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# THE WEAKNESS OF THE GERMAN MACHINE

BY A. MAURICE LOW

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Would any one save a fool go to war with a certain knowledge of defeat? Would a monarch go to war when victory or defeat was evenly balanced? Not unless uncontrollable circumstances forced him into war to save national existence or to accept war as the lesser alternative to revolution. A king who was not a fool would want something more than an even chance before risking his all on the hazard of the sword.

Now it may be set down at the outset that the German Emperor is no fool. Other things he may be, certain qualities he may be deficient in, but a fool he is not. Why then did the German Emperor plunge Europe into war at the beginning of August?

The German Emperor went to war because he believed it was a safe thing to do. No man can say positively how many troops the Great European Powers are able to put in the field, probably not even rulers or war ministers, because of the discrepancies between paper estimates and mobilizations, but theoretically the two rival groups, the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente, lined up:

Germany .....	5,000,000	Russia .....	6,000,000
Austria .....	2,300,000	France .....	3,900,000
Italy .....	1,250,000	England .....	negligible,

an advantage in favor of the Entente of 1,350,000. Seemingly the Triple Alliance would enter the campaign heavily outnumbered, which would give its opponents a superiority almost impossible to overcome.

But while the numerical advantage was with the *Entente* the strategical advantage was with the Alliance. France, between Germany on the east and Italy on the southeast,

would be compelled to divide her forces. On the declaration of war France must send an army to attempt to hold Italy in check, and the French troops on the eastern frontier could not be concentrated until it was known where Germany was to deliver her attack. While the French were in doubt the Germans were certain. They had the inestimable advantage in war of the element of surprise.

Germany, therefore, supported by her Italian ally, had a twofold advantage at the beginning of the war. She could call into the field six and a quarter million men against the four million of France, or an actual superiority of over fifty per cent.; she would compel France to meet attack on both flanks, and the French defense would be uncertain until Germany had developed her campaign, and by that time the German armies, working as a unit, would have penetrated France, while the French armies would still be scattered.

This leaves out of the calculation Austria and Russia, and unquestionably both were dropped from the Emperor's calculations in the first stages of the war. The war at the beginning was to be a war between Germany and France, with such assistance as Italy might render. The German Great General Staff put no high value on Italy's military strength, but Italy was valuable to the Triple Alliance for political reasons, to make her a thorn in the side of France, and for her naval strength. Italy must either be the ally of France or Austria, therefore it was good policy to make her the ally of Austria and the enemy of France; her geographical position made her always a menace to France, and her fleet would compel the French to maintain a strong naval force in the Mediterranean.

Russia did not have to be considered, because her strength would not count until France was defeated. The German Emperor and his military advisers believed they could go through France, smash the French armies, and be in front of Paris in three weeks after the declaration of war, and because Paris is the heart of France more truly than is the capital of any other country, with Paris in their hands the war would be over. As it would take Russia from six to eight weeks to mobilize and bring her armies into the field, there would be plenty of time for the German army after its victorious campaign to be sent back to the eastern frontier.

Every calculation made by the German Emperor miscarried, and he left out of his calculations several factors of supreme importance. Had he not been misinformed as to Great Britain, Belgium, and Servia, the war would not have been provoked.

The Emperor, of course, must have taken Great Britain into account. He must have convinced himself that either Great Britain would remain neutral, or, if she became a combatant, her military resources were negligible. Everything points to the Emperor's belief that England would remain neutral; if this supposition is correct it shows how wretchedly served he has been and what a blown-up bubble German efficiency is.

Three years ago Germany was on the verge of war with England and France. Space will not permit me to do more than mention the Agadir incident in June, 1911, but it was the greatest crisis in the relations between Germany and England since the Emperor had flung the glove in England's face by sending his provocative despatch to Kruger at the time of the Jameson raid. In July, 1911, Mr. Asquith, the Prime Minister, told the House of Commons that England would act in concert with France in the issue raised by Germany over Morocco. I am revealing nothing that was not general knowledge at the time. If Germany violated the neutrality of Belgium, France was told, an English expeditionary force would be sent to her assistance, and the War Office began to make plans to despatch a hundred thousand men. I asked some of my military friends if England could do this. Few believed it, but they thought by great exertion seventy thousand men could be put in the field. Great Britain's military unpreparedness was, of course, as well known to the German Emperor and his General Staff as it was to the average Englishman. It was a fact so palpable and patent that it could not be concealed.

In the three years that have elapsed there has been no increase of British military strength, and everything seemingly convinced the Emperor that England was incapable of engaging in a serious war. It is a political tradition that a Liberal Government will do anything rather than make war; the present Government was supposed to be too much engrossed with social and economic reforms to jeopardize them by war and the financial burdens it imposed, and besides there were many other considerations to tie

the hands of the Government. The German Emperor believed in the truth of the reports made to him that Ireland was on the verge of civil war, and that rifles bought in Germany were in the hands of Ulstermen to resist the forces of the Crown. He was told of the unrest in India, of the mutterings in Egypt. South Africa was only waiting a favorable opportunity to drive out the English. With British garrisons requiring to be strengthened in Ireland, India, Egypt, and South Africa, England would have few, if any, troops to send to France.

We must give the Kaiser credit for being more cautious than some of his actions would indicate. Suppose the British Empire not to be as badly disaffected as the Kaiser's agents had reported, England might be able to do something, but how much? There was, of course, her fleet to be reckoned with, but the British navy must protect England from invasion, and England dare not strip herself of troops. While the British navy was kept in home waters German cruisers would sweep the Atlantic and the Pacific, and drive every British cargo ship off the great trade routes, shutting off the foodstuffs on which England is dependent to feed her people, and the raw materials without which her great industries must stop.

The Kaiser believed England would remain neutral. He had come to have a contempt for England. The English had grown rich, and with wealth they had become indifferent and soft. The fighting spirit had gone out of them. All they wanted was to be left alone, to play football and cricket and golf, to week end, to amuse themselves, and the future might take care of itself. They could be bribed or bullied into remaining passive, and after France had been crushed, and Belgium annexed, it would be easy to settle with England.

To take nothing for granted, to be always dominated by caution, to exaggerate rather than underestimate the enemy, it would be well to concede England throwing her feeble strength with France and Russia, and still the weight would be on the side of Germany, for not only could Germany put more men in the field than France, but she had an army a hundred per cent. more efficient than England, France, or Russia, and mere men are nothing, but efficiency is irresistible.

Efficiency! It is a most alluring word. The whole world

has been made a little mad by it, as if great deeds could be done by mouthing syllables. Men as well as nations have been ruined by the fetish of a name. It is the device of the modern gods, whom they would first destroy they hypnotize with a pet phrase.

For years we have been told of the perfection of the German military machine, and that in two words tells both its strength and weakness. The German army was a "military machine," but an army is something more than a machine. An army consists of three parts—men, *matériel*, and brains, and the first two are valueless without the last; and the German military system made brains subordinate to the machine. The rapidity with which Germany mobilized and brought her soldiers to the colors was a triumph of the machine; the failure of her plans in the field shows her military chiefs relied too much on the machine and attached too little importance to the human element.

I was in Berlin a few years ago and remarked to a friend, who had lived there a long time, that one instinctively felt Berlin was well governed; it was apparent even to a casual visitor that the municipal officials knew their business and were on their job. "Berlin is a striking illustration of German system and German slavishness to rules and regulations," he replied. "Between certain hours on certain days in the week *Unter den Linden* must be watered, and if at that time it is raining cats and dogs you will see the watering-carts stolidly plodding up and down and adding their little contribution to the torrent. To the German an order is an order, and if it runs foul of common sense, so much the worse for common sense. In an English or American city a foreman or a gang-boss acting on his own initiative would keep the watering-carts in the stable. In Berlin, I suppose, nothing less than an edict of the Emperor could suspend an ordinance duly made and provided."

That is efficiency when carried to the *n*th power.

The Emperor's dream of an easy conquest fell to pieces like a house of cards, because seldom, if ever, has there been a government in which inefficiency has more strikingly been revealed than in the one government that has been held up to the world as a model of all that is efficient. A rigid bureaucracy palmed itself off upon its imperial master as genius, and William the Deluded believed what was told him.

It is astounding, it would be unbelievable did we not know it to be a fact, that the German Emperor went to war without being sure of the position of his Italian ally. Italy was an important element in the Kaiser's military and naval plans, but German diplomacy is so feeble that Italy was able to find an excuse for refusing to obey her treaty obligations and to leave Germany in the lurch at the most critical moment in her history. Had Italy done what the Emperor expected, had she sent her troops into France and her fleet to the Mediterranean, England and France would have had a harder task.

The Kaiser's diplomacy was equally as inefficient in regard to England. He believed implicitly what he wanted to believe. To be told that English regiments were on the verge of mutiny, and Irish regiments could no longer be relied on, must have been as gratifying as the reports of the hopeless condition of the French army. The Kaiser has been occupied with too many other matters to be able to devote much time to modern English literature, but had he read *The Mutiny of the Mavericks* it would have profited him more than the reports of his Great General Staff and his secret agents and spies. Nobody understands the Irish—not even the Irish themselves—except the English, and their knowledge is at times rudimentary. It was the Second Conspirator who remarked, after Mulcahy had failed to corrupt the Mavericks: “I consider this will be a lesson to us. We're left again. Those cursed Irish have let us down. I knew they would.” It is a way “those cursed Irish” have, “the genius of the Irish for conspiracies is remarkable.” The Irish will fight the English for the love of fighting, but woe to the outsider so rash as to join in the fray.

The Kaiser drew his sword, and, lo! it worked magic. Irishmen forgot their grievances. The native princes and the people of India rallied to the defense of the Empire, and Sikhs and Ghoorkas fought by the side of English and Irish on the soil of France. South Africa perversely elected to fight with England instead of against her. Fatuously the Emperor believed that Canada and Australia were “disloyal,” and they gave of their best blood and contributed their money to confound him. The bugle sounded, and before its notes ceased from every quarter of the widely scattered Empire her sons were falling into line, shoulder

to shoulder, English and Irish, Scotch and Welsh; from the frozen north and the burning plains, from valley and veldt the legions came; under the Southern Cross the watch fires gleamed, from the rim of the Arctic her soldiers streamed.

Turn from diplomacy to the strictly military and the inefficiency of the Great General Staff—than which in all the history of the world there was supposed never to have been its equal—is even more glaringly revealed. It was the business and duty of the Great General Staff to have known the precise military resources of France, the military efficiency of Russia, and the “weight” of Austria in the military equation. The Kaiser’s military advisers, as the results have shown, underestimated French strength almost as much as they did that of England; their knowledge of the celerity with which Russia could mobilize was as inexact as that of the ordinary layman; they deluded themselves when they regarded Austria as an ally upon whom they could rely.

They were so little masters of their profession that Belgium as a foe never entered into their calculations. They expected to overrun Belgium as a swarm of locusts lays bare the vegetation on which it alights, and the Belgian army was a nest of hornets, with death in their sting. Of the fighting quality of the Servians they knew nothing, and the Servians fought so well that they were able to hold Austria at bay until she was compelled to gather up all her loosely jointed strength in the hopeless attempt to stay the Russian advance.

The German soldier has fought magnificently, but he has been recklessly, brutally, foolishly sacrificed by his commanders. Grant was criticized for being a “butcher,” but Grant could afford to sacrifice men in his attempt to turn Lee’s flank because of his superiority in men and resources. The Germans were justified in risking enormous losses to fight a short and decisive campaign. But when the German encircling movement before Paris was checked, and the British left first halted Von Kluck’s advance and forced the retreat of the entire German army, it must have been obvious to the German General Staff that the war, instead of being over in a few weeks, would last many months. The advantage of numbers was no longer with the Germans. Every day saw the German ranks thinned and those of the Allies growing stouter, fed by British reinforcements and



the overseas troops of the Empire. The situation called for a change in both strategy and tactics, and especially the conservation of their resources, but the German officer is wedded to formalism and cannot change.

The German navy is admittedly weaker than the British, but that inferiority was to be compensated by dashing raids on the English coast and the paralysis of British commerce. These were the plans the *Admiralstab* long ago worked out. "War is attack," Von der Goltz declared. The importance of striking the first blow German strategists have repeatedly affirmed. What the German navy may do it would be unwise to predict, but at the time of writing the war has lasted nearly two months and the German navy has done nothing. That statement does not ignore the destruction of British ships by mines or the brilliant feat of the submarine attack on the *Cressy* and her consorts, but the loss of a few cruisers will no more decide the mastery of the sea than the wiping out of a patrol of uhlans will determine the fate of a battle. Only when the ships of the line, the dreadnoughts, have come into action will it be known whether Britannia still rules the waves or a mightier naval power has come out of the North Sea.

On the other hand, the British navy has penned up the German High Sea Fleet in the North Sea and compelled it to seek the security of Heligoland and the Kiel Canal, and so long as it remains behind land fortifications it is safe from attack, and it is also useless. Great Britain has brought troops from all over the world, she has sent her army and supplies to France, and her commerce is practically uninterfered with. In co-operation with France she has bottled up the entire Austrian navy and kept the Mediterranean open. And all this has been accomplished with the loss of five cruisers, which is offset by the destruction of three German cruisers and three or more submarines.

What then is the explanation of the German collapse, military and diplomatic, the confusion of the Emperor's calculations? There are two reasons.

The first is that the whole world has lain under the obsession of the might of German militarism, and Germany has been no less obsessed than the rest of the world. The Great General Staff has not been composed of Moltkes or Von Roons, but Prussian Thomas Gradgrinds. Junkers of reali-

ties. Junkers of facts and calculations, slightly to paraphrase Dickens. Junkers who proceeded upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who were not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Junkers with a rule and a pair of scales and the multiplication table always in their pockets. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. The Great General Staff was a much better guide-book to Europe than the latest Baedeker. They knew the exact distance in kilometers from Berlin to obscure villages in France; they had the forts and bridges starred; they knew down to a fraction the range of guns. Facts, nothing but facts. They made a fetish of facts. Their system was perfection.

But the whole perfect system was wrong because it was created on wrong principles. It was an attempt to make men machines, and when training is carried to such extreme lengths that men become machines they cease to be valuable as men. If a man is required to do the same thing in the same way at the same place day after day, week after week, month after month, year succeeding year, the nearer he comes to being a machine the better, perhaps, he will do what is required of him, but that is not war. No two days in war are ever the same, no two battles are ever exactly alike. It was easy for the German General Staff to weigh and measure and multiply. So many men so much food, so many men so much ammunition, so many miles from here to there, so many hours to get from here to there, and all the calculations worked out, checked, approved, and initialed, passed upon by the higher authorities, indexed and filed. Everything correct, nothing left to chance, no hurry, no danger of anything being forgotten. But this is not war, although it is magnificent office work. It is the perfection of system, but campaigns are not fought with card-indexes. Probably it is true that the German Staff maps of France are better than the maps of the French General Staff, but battles are not fought on maps. The Germans are so enmeshed in details that from them they could not escape; they had become so much slaves of system, habit, routine, that on the field they were still weighing and measuring and multiplying. And that is not the way battles are won.

And the other reason to explain the collapse, the lifting of the obsession, the destruction of the myth of German military genius, is the vicious and immoral spy system that

is one of the results of militarism. The German Foreign Office, the German General Staff, the German Admiralty—and it is only fair to say that what Germany did all other nations also did—relied for information on men and women who were employed to lie and steal and corrupt, whose value was their ability to lie and steal and corrupt. It was on these wretched creatures, without conscience and without morals, without even loyalty to their employers, without the honor that is supposed to exist among thieves, who took money from Germany and betrayed her, who traded in secrets they were hired to obtain, that the German Emperor relied on for information. These were the men, for instance, on whose reports the Emperor believed that civil war was impending in Ireland, that India was seething with sedition; these were the men who were employed to encourage rebellion in Ireland and to preach sedition in India; and, again, it is unfortunate that the Emperor does not know his Kipling.

That any nation should place the slightest reliance on the hired spy, known to be willing to sell his services to any government foolish enough to buy them, is to the average person having even slight knowledge of human nature incomprehensible, and yet this is the foundation on which the political and military departments of all the European governments rests. Every government is spying on every other. Every government is trying to find out the political and naval and military secrets of every other. Every government is constantly corrupting the servants of every other. If France has a new gun it will not be long before Germany knows, and then the men who can betray the secret are entangled or bribed or seduced. It is a state of affairs so shocking, so disgraceful, so vicious that it reflects upon civilization, and withal it is so futile. No nation profits by it, certainly no nation can trust in the good faith or the candor of its spies. A spy may be able to steal or buy a document or plan, who but a fool would believe the information brought by a spy? And that is the mystery of it. Rulers and statesmen are not fools, but they are foolish enough to take the word of a spy as if he were an honest man. If the world is to be freed from the menace of militarism the first requirement is the banishment of the spy, whose employment is as revolting to moral conscience as the poisoner and the hired assassin.

A. MAURICE LOW.